

Music Culture of the Elisabethan Convent in Prague

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Abstract

The Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (Elisabethan Nuns) were a spiritual order primarily focused on administering healthcare. Therefore, music was never the main focus of the order's activities, as it often was in others, particularly educational orders. However, thanks to the uninterrupted historical continuity of the Prague convent, which was exempted from the restrictions of Joseph II's era, many sources illustrating the convent music culture were preserved, including an extensive collection of music.

The dissertation aims to describe this music culture in the context of the order structure and its personal hierarchy, as part of the city of Prague and its civic institutions, and in its everyday life and characteristics such as enclosure, hospital service and recreational activities.

Music in convents was always tightly bound to liturgy. In the case of the Elisabethan order, significant music production was focused on the order's main liturgical feasts such as S. Elizabeth, S. Francis of Assisi, Porciuncula, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and also memorial services for deceased patrons of the convent.

The convent cooperated with many lay musicians and composers such as F. X. Brixi, Z. V. Suchý, F. X. Labler, J. N. Bayer, among others. At the same time, a number of female musicians and composers were active inside the convent community. The 18th century lists of names of nuns include music directors, organists, and musicians as well as female bass singers. The inventory of musical instruments included two organs, violins, a viola d'amore, two cellos, double bass, lutes, harps and keyboards.

An integral part of 19th century culture in Prague was charitable activities for the sake of the convent hospital. These included music academies, dance parties, concerts and carousels.

The musical repertoire in the Our Lady of Sorrows Church was dependent on the transformation of the liturgy tradition as well as on period taste, the circulation of available sheet music, and the composers active at the time. The earliest historical level of convent

music sources is the “old collection” containing repertoire with similar characteristics to the style of the Franciscan Friars. Even before 1750, the practice had expanded into “musica figuralis,” including favourite brass “intradn”. Soon after this, the convent started to participate in the custom of Easter oratorios, performances which became frequent in Prague monasteries and convents after around 1720. Special musical events took place in 1776 when the double anniversary in the convent was celebrated: 50 years from the vows of the mother superior M. Deodata von Klausnitz OSE and the laying of the first stone of the new convent hospital building in the same year.

Liturgy reforms in 1784 stopped the “musica figuralis” for a time, but it was restored as early as around 1790. In the 19th century, the usual church music repertoire was played in the convent. In the church musicians as F. X. Labler, J. N. Bayer the elder and junior, as well as societies as General Cyrilian Association were active.

The task of following research will be comparison of music culture in the Elizabethan Nuns convent in context of other different female or male spiritual orders.